

OCTOBER 3, 1974

The longest wet spell in the history of the Shorgrass Country ended last week. For six days and six nights, floods and floodlets soaked the ground. Business in coffee houses flourished as the citizens gathered to rework the flood news. More mud was tracked in the cafes than in any decade previous to the big rains.

After about the third day of rain, herders around Mertzon began to worry that it wasn't going to stop. Hombres older than myself began to fret about the washed out roads and fences. Strangers would have thought they owned a baby blanket factory with a leaky roof. Four short months ago, everything the herders owned was eating from sacks. Rain should have revived those awful memories.

Rain-stopping has never been a problem in the Shortgrass Country. Rain-starting has broke scores of hombres, but the braking part has been easy.

I've seen and heard all my life of grass being too sappy from too much moisture. What was hard all my life was seeing grass that disappeared and turned to stubble. When we get hurt is when the grass supply is limited to the six minute grama that grows far underneath prickly pear. I get plenty tired hearing how close frost is and how far away spring is. Mourners are hard to understand during a rain in the desert.

High water was causing them to worry, too. About 60 times a day, one of them would ask if I had the water-gaps up at the ranch. I'd have to stop playing dominoes and explain that I hadn't had time to put back the water gaps from the flood of '71. The last big money my family made out here was before fences and water gaps were invented. I never was interested in digging; tamping posts and shoveling are way out of my line of work.

People have long been too persnickety about their fences. Here they were living in a land that abounded in forked sticks to prop up their fences, yet instead of utilizing the native timber, they import cedar posts and steeples from as far away as overseas.

It's flat dumb to take one of those ghastly pieces of steel called a crowbar to the moist soil of a section of bottomland. A piece of stout mesquite, dug from a pile of drift, will hold net wire up for weeks and weeks.

Pastures don't need to be too stock proof. We've got a lot of good calves by having weak fences. Our neighbors buy good bulls. Bulls that they are proud of. It'd hurt their feelings if we threw up an ox proof barrier. I wouldn't hurt any of their feelings over a bunch of useless fence building.

Furthermore, I sure hate for one of my sons to catch his old daddy fencing out the Black Bingoe, the offspring of old Triple Hock. That wouldn't look good at all.

Ranchers had better start thinking how they waste their money. As tight and hard as the jug keepers are going to be during this cow depression, steeples and wire are going to look mighty bad. Thrift is going to be a cherished virtue. Dime-a-game dominoes aren't going to show up near as red as the cost of fences and fencing.

The rain did stop. Hardware stores are selling wire and posts in big orders. Herders are tearing to the ranch to waste their money. From the way they act, you'd think they were staking off a mining claim instead of protecting a broke down calf factory.

Our fences aren't going to be hard to repair. Two of us built three miles this morning. I don't think other herders here will ever change, but if they do they'll like my method a lot better than digging and tamping.